

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-15. (cancelled).

16. (currently amended) A needle apparatus ~~wherein~~ which comprises a thin walled sleeve having a proximal end and a distal end, a tubular needle having a distal end and a proximal end, the needle having a sharp point at the distal end thereof and being hollow throughout its entire length, the sleeve being mounted about the needle and the needle being closely engaged by the sleeve, the needle and the sleeve being longitudinally moveable relative to one another between a first position at which the needle extends from the sleeve and a second position at which the sharp point is located within the sleeve, the needle remaining at least partially within the sleeve at all times and remaining in the fluid flow path of the apparatus at all times, the apparatus further comprising a hub in which the needle is fixedly mounted adjacent the proximal end of the needle such that the needle and the hub are arranged to move longitudinally together at all times, the needle extending from the hub so that the distal end of the needle is located externally of the hub, the sleeve having the proximal end thereof located within the hub and being longitudinally slidably mounted relative to the hub, the sleeve extending from the hub so that the distal end thereof is located externally of the hub, the sleeve being unlatched in the first position but being latched in the second position, the needle being arranged to pierce tissue when the needle and the sleeve

are in the first position to form an incision and the sleeve being arranged to enter the incision such that after the tissue has been pierced the needle is arranged to be withdrawn from the tissue by application to the hub of longitudinal traction in the proximal direction by an operator whilst the sleeve remains *in situ* in the tissue as a result of pressure applied radially by surrounding tissue, the arrangement being such that when the needle has been withdrawn to the second position and the sleeve is latched the sleeve is prevented from being retracted relative to the needle.

17. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 16, wherein subsequent to withdrawal of the needle from the tissue the sleeve is arranged to be withdrawn from the tissue by application of further longitudinal traction to the hub.

18. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the sleeve is provided with a laterally extending projection and means is provided for positively engaging the projection in the second position so as to latch the sleeve.

19. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the projection is located within the hub.

20. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the projection is in the form of a disc.

21. (currently amended) A needle apparatus according to claim 18, wherein there is provided ~~at least one finger~~ a plurality of fingers arranged to engage with the projection in the second

position so as to prevent movement of the sleeve towards the proximal end thereof.

22. (currently amended) A needle apparatus according to Claim 21, wherein the ~~or each finger is~~ fingers are located within the hub.

23. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the needle moves a distance between the first and second positions.

24. (canceled).

25. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the pressure applied by the surrounding tissue acts directly on the sleeve.

26. (previously presented) A method for operating a needle apparatus according to claim 16, wherein tissue is pierced by the sharp point of the needle with the needle and the sleeve in the relative first position, the sleeve then enters the tissue and the needle is subsequently withdrawn from the tissue by application of longitudinal traction to the hub by an operator in the proximal direction until the needle and the sleeve reach the second relative position.

27. (previously presented) A method according to claim 26, wherein following withdrawal of the needle from the tissue the sleeve may be withdrawn from the tissue by application of further longitudinal traction to the hub.

28. (currently amended) A needle apparatus ~~wherein~~ which comprises a thin walled sleeve having a proximal end and a distal end, a tubular needle having a distal end and a proximal end, the needle having a sharp point at the distal end thereof and hollow through its length, the sleeve being mounted about the needle and the needle being closely engaged by the sleeve, the needle and the sleeve being longitudinally moveable relative to one another between a first position at which the needle extends from the sleeve and a second position at which the sharp point is located within the sleeve, the needle remaining at least partially within the sleeve at all times, the apparatus further comprising a hub in which the needle is fixedly mounted adjacent the proximal end of the needle such that the needle and the hub are arranged to move longitudinally together at all times and remaining in the fluid flow path of the apparatus at all times, the needle extending from the hub so that the distal end of the needle is located externally of the hub, the sleeve having the proximal end thereof located within the hub and being longitudinally slidably mounted relative to the hub, the sleeve extending from the hub so that the distal end thereof is located externally of the hub, the sleeve being unlatched in the first position but being latched in the second position, the needle being arranged to pierce tissue when the needle and the sleeve are in the first position to form an incision and the sleeve being arranged to enter the incision, a catheter introducer being mounted about the sleeve initially so as to frictionally engage the sleeve, the catheter introducer comprising a sheath which enters the tissue simultaneously with the sleeve, such that after the tissue has been pierced the needle is arranged to be withdrawn from the tissue by application to the hub of longitudinal traction in the proximal direction by an operator whilst the sleeve and the sheath remain *in situ* in the tissue as a result of the pressure applied radially by

surrounding tissue to the sheath, the arrangement being such that when the needle has been withdrawn to the second position and the sleeve is latched the sleeve is prevented from being retracted relative to the needle.

29. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 28, wherein when the sleeve moves to the second position the sleeve may be withdrawn from the sheath to leave the catheter introducer in place in the tissue.

30. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 29, wherein the catheter introducer also has a further hub attached to the sheath, the further hub being arranged to be restrained from movement manually or by attachment to skin upon movement of the sleeve.

31. (previously presented) A needle apparatus according to claim 28, wherein the catheter introducer after withdrawal of the needle apparatus is arranged to act as a guide for introduction of longer devices such as guide wires, catheters and endoscopic devices.